

THE DOXOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

The author argues that Christian ethics is closely tied not only to doctrine, but to worship as well. Being rooted in the justness of God, it is both a component and a direct consequence of worship. This fact points to the true meaning of “orthodoxy,” namely, correct or true praise. Historically, such connection has been specially emphasized by the Greek Orthodox and the Reformed traditions. In Protestantism, doxology as the origin and aim of ethics is a trademark of the Reformed movement since John Calvin placed the glory of God at the center of his theology, being followed by the Reformed catechisms, such as those of Heidelberg and Westminster. Therefore, there is an inescapable closeness of liturgy and ethics, as expressed in the ancient maxim “lex orandi, lex credendi.” In the second part of the article, the author articulates a biblical theology of doxological ethics, addressing topics such as the glory of God, gratitude as the highest commandment, awe before God as the starting point for Christian ethics, and the twofold duty to love God and others. Finally, there is a comparison suggested by missiology between shame-oriented and guilt-oriented cultures, the former being concerned with honor and the latter with justness. Such orientations derive from sin both as a violation of God’s law (guilt) and as an encroachment on God’s honor/glory (shame).

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KEYWORDS

Christian ethics; Doxology; Worship; Orthodox tradition; Reformed tradition; Glory of God; Ten Commandments; Shame and guilt.

“If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen”. (1 Peter 4:11)

1. WORSHIP AND ETHICS

All told, Christian ethics is so inseparably bound to the Christian faith that it cannot at all exist as a freely floating entity. Dogmatics (Christian doctrine) and ethics (Christian praxis) belong inextricably linked.¹ Heiko Krimmer writes the following on this matter:

There is no such thing as Biblical, Christian ethics. That there is such a specialist field within the concept of theology at all is a consequence of the invasion of the Enlightenment into theology. What we nowadays describe and discuss under the umbrella term of “Christian ethics,” i.e., Christian praxis, was originally contained in all the individual areas of theology and did not claim to have its specific area. A biblical and, more specifically, Christian ethic was first declared to be its own domain when Kant, for example, presented his Enlightenment ethics with its own ethical edifice. And yet, it is not possible to speak about Christian praxis which is removed from Christian faith. Ethics and dogmatics, life and doctrine, do not allow themselves under any circumstances to be separated from each other within the Bible’s perimeter.²

When Georg Calixt put forth the first independent work on ethics in 1634, his intention was not to separate himself from dogmatics, but “rather to include philosophical ethics within dogmatics.”³ However, in the long run that led to the same result, namely, that ethics was uncoupled from dogmatics and from exegesis.⁴ In contrast to this, Emil Brunner wrote similarly to Krimmer: “One can only correctly present all of ethics as a part of dogmatics because ethics is also a question of God’s actions upon and through people.”⁵

¹ Up to the 18th century, the terms “Glaubenslehre” and “Sittenlehre” were used in German; beginning in the 19th century, “Dogmatik” and “Ethik” (English: dogmatics and ethics).

² KRIMMER, Heiko. “Grundlagen christlicher Ethik.” Printed excerpt from *Das Fundament: Zeitschrift des DCTB*. Korntal: no year provided, p. 2.

³ HONECKER, Martin. *Einführung in die Theologische Ethik*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990, p. 25.

⁴ I say this in opposition to Honecker, pp. 25-31. On pp. 25-31 there is a good overview of various classifications of dogmatics and ethics over the course of the history of theology.

⁵ BRUNNER, Emil. *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*. Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1939⁴, p. 71-72.

Christian ethics is also no continuation of and, all the more, no appendage to Christian worship. Rather, it is a direct component and a direct consequence of worship. C. H. Dodd wrote: “The Christian religion is, as is Judaism . . . , an ethical religion in the special sense that it does not acknowledge a final separation between worship and social behavior.”⁶

That worship and ethics in Christianity are so closely linked with each other has to do with the fact that God is a just God, and that on the basis of the justness of his essence, all of ethics is determined. Thus, Gottfried Quell writes the following about the Old Testament:

One could say that justice comprises the foundation of the vision of God in the Old Testament . . . That God sets what justice is and as a just God is bound to justice is an indispensable proposition for the Old Testament knowledge of God in all its variations.⁷

For that reason, there are also areas that are normally not addressed in drafts of Christian ethics, such as prayer,⁸ worship, and the Christian church, which in general belong among the innermost issues of Christian ethics.⁹ The expression used for true, pure teaching, orthodoxy [Greek: *orthos* = correct, straight; *doxein* = to praise, to extol], on the basis of the meaning of the word, means neither true teaching nor true praxis. Rather, it brings both of these together to express true veneration of God.

While Paul speaks in Romans 1:18-32 of an irrational worship which refuses to give God thanks, the first thing he mentions in the practical portion in Romans 12:1 (“Therefore, I urge you...”) is that we are exhorted in view of God’s mercy to place our life, “with neck and crop” (as the saying goes) at God’s disposal, for “this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1 – NIV; alternatively, “this is the reasonable way for you to worship” – International Standard Version). A form of worship which does not have practical consequences in all areas of life is an irrational form of worship. Even if all confessions surely share this thought, this fact has historically been emphasized primarily by Orthodox and Reformed believers, and in the present above all

⁶ DODD, C. H. *Das Gesetz der Freiheit: Glaube und Gehorsam nach dem Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments*. München: Chr. Kaiser, 1960, p. 7.

⁷ QUELL, Gottfried. “Der Rechtsgedanke im AT,” pp. 176-180. In: KITTEL, Gerhard (ed.). *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. 10 vols. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1990 (reprints from 1933-1979), vol. II, here pp. 176+178. Quell certainly assumes that the legal thought of Israel was so strong that it shaped the thinking about God. According to the New Testament understanding, however, it was just the opposite (comp. what is said about the image of God in Lesson 54.2, also comp. Lessons 44.10 and 33.A.2).

⁸ See, for example, ELERT, Werner. *Das christliche Ethos: Grundlinien der lutherischen Ethik*. Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1961², pp. 397-408 (“Das Gebet”). Comp., for instance, Calvin’s long discussion on prayer in all editions of his magnum opus, *The Institutes*.

⁹ See the introduction and arrangement of my *Ethik*. 8 vols. Nürnberg: VTR, 2009⁴.

by the Orthodox and Evangelicals (who have a Reformed or Baptist heritage). The degree to which that ethic has actually been put into practice is another story and is a topic for sociological and historical analysis.

In his study titled “Singing the Ethos of God,” Brian R. Brock¹⁰ considers the Psalms to be a pattern for Christian ethics. They do not speak only about and of God. Rather, they are conversations with God which receive ethics, develop ethics, ask for strength to achieve their fulfillment, and thank God for his ordinances, directions, and help. In addition to his exegetical studies, the author refers to St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

2. REFORMED THEOLOGY

In the Protestant realm, doxology, as the origin and aim of ethics, became a trademark of the Reformed movement. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches did not coincidentally name its centennial celebration “The Glory of God and the Future of Man.”¹¹ For John Calvin¹² – in order to limit ourselves to the best known of the many “Reformed reformers” – the glory of God is the individual’s goal in life, and it is the goal of the entire history of salvation.

The regiment belongs to the Lord, and for people as much as for the entire world there is nothing, outside of his glory, worth striving for. What can diminish God’s glory is foolish, irrational, and malicious.”¹³

... it is not very sound theology to confine a man’s thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves. As all things flowed from him, and subsist in him, so, says Paul (Romans xi.36), they ought to be referred to him. I acknowledge, indeed, that the Lord, the better to recommend the glory of his name to men, has tempered zeal for the promotion and extension of it, by uniting it indissolubly with our salvation. But since he has taught that this zeal ought to exceed all thought and care for our own good and

¹⁰ BROCK, Brian R. *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007.

¹¹ *Die Herrlichkeit Gottes und die Zukunft des Menschen: Hundertjahrkonsultation 1977*. Genf: Reformierter Weltbund, 1977.

¹² On Calvin’s teaching about praise and worship, see, in particular, MOELLER, Pamela Ann. *Calvin’s Doxology: Worship in the 1559 Institutes...* Princeton Theological Monograph Series 44. Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1997; on Calvin’s view of the glory of God, see NIESEL, Wilhelm. *Lobt Gott, den Herrn der Herrlichkeit: Theologie um Gottes Ehre*. Konstanz: Christliche Verlagsanstalt, 1983, pp. 13-16; BUSCH, Eberhard. “Calvins Verkündigung der Herrlichkeit Gottes.” www.reformiert-info.de/288-0-105-16.html or www.calvin09.org/calvin-theo/calvin-theo-texte/herlichkeit.html (accessed on January 18, 2010); comp. also TYNE, James J. “Putting Contexts in Their Place: God’s Transcendence in Calvin’s Institutes...,” pp. 369-395 in: SCHLISSEL, Steven M. (ed.). *The Standard Bearer*. Nacogdoches, Texas: CMP, 2002.

¹³ CALVIN, Johannes. *Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift: Römerbrief und Korintherbriefe*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960, p. 240.

advantage, and since natural equity also teaches that God does not receive what is his own, unless he is preferred to all things, it certainly is the part of a Christian man to ascend higher than merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul.¹⁴

For Calvin, the glory of God is primarily found (1) in creation, (2) in Christ, and (3) in the goal of salvation history.

It was typical of Calvin to place a comprehensive and personal appeal for prayer, for the church as well as with particular regard for the private realm, before the exegesis of the Lord's Prayer. At the same time, the experience of answered prayer plays a significant role for him,¹⁵ as Calvin is overall marked by a deep, practical piety. In spite of his deep exegetical and systematic digging, he allows the experience of Christian life to flow into his work.¹⁶ "According to the line we have noted up to this point, everything is – and it should not be a surprise – geared towards instruction for prayer. This is demonstrated in the disposition."¹⁷ The true mark of the church is, according to Calvin, not the preaching of the Word of God, but rather its observance,¹⁸ and that is especially expressed in personal prayer.

The Reformed view has found its classical expression in the famous first two questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, dating from 1647:

1. What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.¹⁹

The Heidelberg Catechism expresses it somewhat differently but likewise powerfully in that the chapter on ethics built upon the Ten Commandments goes by the title "Of Thankfulness."²⁰ However, as is generally known, this all

¹⁴ Translation from www.glaubensstimme.de/doku.php?id=autoren:calvin:calvin-antwort_an_kardinal_sadolet.

¹⁵ Comp. SCHOLL, Hans. "Der Dienst des Gebetes nach Johannes Calvin." Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1968 (Bern Dissertation); BÖTTGER, Paul C. *Calvins Institutio als Erbauungsbuch*. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990, pp. 71-74; comp. HARASTA, Eva. *Lob und Bitte: Eine systematisch-theologische Untersuchung über das Gebet*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005, pp. 112-142.

¹⁶ Comp. OBENDIEK, Harmannus. "Die Erfahrung in ihrem Verhältnis zum Worte Gottes bei Calvin," pp. 180-214 in: *Aus Theologie und Geschichte der reformierten Kirche. Festgabe für E. F. Karl Müller*. Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1933.

¹⁷ BÖTTGER, *Calvins Institutio als Erbauungsbuch*, p. 71.

¹⁸ In particular in WARFIELD, Benjamin B. *Calvin and Augustine*. The B. B. Warfield Collection. Phillipsburgh, PA: P & R, 1956, p. 16.

¹⁹ Quoted in: *Der kürzere Westminster Katechismus von 1647*. Translated by Kurt Vetterli. MBS Texte Reformiertes Forum 61. Bonn: Martin Bucer Seminar, 2006; also at www.bucer.eu.

²⁰ According to the Heidelberg Catechismus. Translated by Thomas Schirmacher. MBS Texte Reformiertes Forum 59. Bonn: Martin Bucer Seminar, 2005; comp. as a classical commentary on these

goes back to Martin Luther's similar approach of introducing the explanation of each of the Ten Commandments with the words: "We should fear and love God, so that we..."

The glory of God as the goal of "Calvinists" was also something that flowed into Max Weber's famous thesis that Calvinists had developed capitalism. A classical description of Calvinists from this discussion should suffice as a representative indication:

Everything comes down to the moment when God is honored: the entire world is appointed for his glory; the same thing is the task of the Christian. God seeks activity on the part of Christians in the world and society; for these should be so established that they serve the glory of God; social work, i.e., work in the world and society, in which Calvinism is enjoined as a duty in majorem gloriam Dei, and it is precisely this character which is also found in vocational work.²¹

In a monumental section of his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth, as is generally known, discarded the differentiation between dogmatics and ethics and in good Reformed fashion set the glory of God at the center of the "perfections of God" (as he ingeniously called the attributes of God) as a landmark.²² Glory "is the appearing paragon of all divine perfections. It is the fullness of the divinity of God. It is the eruptive, expressive, manifesting reality of all that which God is. It is the essence of God inasmuch as God is a self-revealing being."²³

3. ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

Outside of the Protestant realm, doxology has always been emphasized as the origin and aim of Christian ethics above all in Orthodox theology. A few examples should suffice. Geoffrey Wainwright calls his combined dogmatics and ethics *Doxology*.²⁴ Every systematic theology is a "theology of worship."²⁵ Vigen Guroian champions the same view in his ethics, in particular in his chapter

two questions: VINCENT, Thomas. *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly Explained from Scripture*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980 (original 1674), pp. 1-24, and WATSON, Thomas. *A Body of Divinity: Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Assembly's Catechism*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986 (original 1692), pp. 6-38.

²¹ RACHFAHL, Felix. "Kalvinismus und Kapitalismus," pp. 65-148 in: WINCKELMANN, Johannes (ed.). *Max Weber. Die protestantische Ethik II: Kritiken und Antikritiken*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1978^o, pp. 65-66.

²² BARTH, Karl. *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*. Study Edition. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987, vol. 7, pp. 722-764; comp. vol. 8, pp. 362-365; comp. additionally *ibid.*, vol. 31. Gesamtregister, p. 246 (keyword "Herrlichkeit" [glory]). Comp. as a new example FRAME, John M. *The Doctrine of God*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002, in particular pp. 592-595.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 725.

²⁴ WAINWRIGHT, Geoffrey. *Doxology: A Systematic Theology*. London: Epworth Press, 1980².

²⁵ *Ibid.*, "Preface," no page.

“Seeing Worship as Ethics.”²⁶ He emphasizes that ethics and doctrine are not to be separated from religious practice, at the apex of which stands worship.²⁷

Stanley Samuel Harakas likewise emphasizes the character of ethics as worship in his two-volume work on ethics.²⁸ “Theoria and Praxis” are not to be separated.²⁹ The viewpoint that worship and ethics have to be lived out sounds very similar to evangelical and pietistic formulations. In the United States, where Orthodox and Evangelicals most frequently deal with each other at eye level, an unusual display of unity is demonstrated by repeatedly speaking about this openly.

It is typical that the Orthodox systematic theologian Geoffrey Wainwright expressly and approvingly quotes the first article of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a Reformed document!³⁰ And it is likewise typical that Wilhelm Niesel refers to the “slogan of Reformed believers throughout time,” “To God alone be the glory.” At the same time, he asks whether this does not have to be witnessed to by all churches, and in so doing he refers to Easter Jubilation in the Greek Orthodox Church as an example.³¹

4. OTHER DENOMINATIONS

Whoever thinks that doxology is only found to be the justification and goal of ethics in the Reformed and Orthodox spheres will soon discover that all denominations confess this in principle. It is in each case only a question of how prominently this actually works itself out in the dogmatic and ethical system – and, of course, how it looks in practice.

Thus, “all for the greater glory of God” (“omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam”) was Ignatius Loyola’s (1491-1556) motto. Loyola was the founder of the Jesuit Order. He wrote the following in his *Spiritual Exercises*: “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord.”³² In the confession of faith of the decrees of the First Vatican Council (1870-1871), one reads in point

²⁶ GUROIAN, Vigen. *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*. Notre Dame, Iowa: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, pp. 51-78.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁸ HARAKAS, Stanley Samuel. *Toward Transfigured Life: The ‘Theoria’ of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*. Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1984, in part. pp. 188-196; vol. 2: *Living the Faith: The Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*, 1992.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

³⁰ WAINWRIGHT, *Doxology*, p. 17.

³¹ NIESEL, Wilhelm, *Lobt Gott, den Herrn der Herrlichkeit: Theologie um Gottes Ehre*. Konstanz: Christliche Verlagsanstalt, 1983, p. 11.

³² Chapter 23, quoted in <http://www.jesuiten.org/geschichte/index.htm> of Feb. 24, 2009. See also as a new Catholic example HÖRMANN, Karl. *Lexikon der christlichen Moral*. Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1976. Col. 109-39 (“Bestimmung des Menschen” – English translation: “Man’s Calling”).

5 of the Canons the following: “If anyone . . . denies that the world was created for the glory of God: let him be anathema.”³³

From a Lutheran point of view, Amy C. Schifrin laments that the basic problem in modern Christian social ethics is “the cosmetic separation of ethics from doxology,” and she calls for “doxological ethics.”³⁴ Such examples can be cited from all Christian denominations and orientations.

5. LITURGY AND ETHICS

“Honor be unto the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever will be and from eternity to eternity. Amen.” Since the fourth century, this liturgical refrain has marked Christian worship services and has summarized its elementary theological structure.³⁵

Our question in the discussion often concentrates on the relationship between liturgy and ethics. Liturgy is indeed, on the one hand, only a part of the entire spectrum of worship. However, it is its most visible and most significant expression. This is due to the fact that God seeks public and collective reverence and pronouncement of his glory. Furthermore, the body of Christ, the church, is most visible when more than anything else it corporately celebrates the Lord’s Supper and, in so doing, sacramentally places thanksgiving to God and Christ at the center of the faith.

The ancient maxim “*lex orandi, lex credendi*,” meaning that whatever one prays and confesses in worship is what determines faith and action, is mainly held high by Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed churches,³⁶ but admittedly has fallen into oblivion in a number of wings of the evangelical spectrum. Calvin, for instance, assumed that the church had to intensively work on what occurs in the worship service, for it is through the word, song, and sacrament that the everyday life of believers is shaped. As a

³³ DS 3025 (1976 edition).

³⁴ SCHIFRIN, Amy C. “Delight, Design and Destiny: Toward a Doxological Ethics of Sexuality” (composed on Apr. 28, 2009), <http://www.lutheranforum.org/sexuality/delight-design-and-destiny-toward-a-doxological-ethics-of-sexuality/> (accessed on Jan. 18, 2009).

³⁵ WAINWRIGHT, Geoffrey. “Systematisch-theologische Grundlegung,” pp. 72-92, in: SCHMIDT-LAUBER, Hans-Christoph; BIERITZ, Karl-Heinrich, *Handbuch der Liturgik*. Leipzig: Ev. Verlagsanstalt, 1995, p. 72.

³⁶ See above all STURFLESSER, Martin; WINTER, Stefan. “*Ahne nach, was du vollziehst*”: *Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik*. Studien zur Pastoralliturgie 22. Regensburg: Pustet, 2009; comp. also WAINWRIGHT, *Doxology*, pp. 218-286 on the Orthodox and Catholic discussion; SAUTER, Gerhard. *Zugänge zur Dogmatik: Elemente theologischer Urteilsbildung*. Göttingen: V&R, 1998, p. 22 on Lutheran and Anglican discussion; NGIEN, Dennis. *Gifted Response: The Triune God as the Causative Agency of our Responsive Worship*. Milton Kenyes (GB): Paternoster, 2008. pp. 1-2 (Basil of Caesarea), 56-58 (Anselm), 75-76 (Augustine), 159 (Calvin). An evangelical justification is found in ZAHL, Paul F. M. “Formal-Liturgical Worship,” pp. 23-40 in: ZAHL, Paul F. M. et al. *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006, here pp. 25-27.

matter of fact, it is often underestimated, for instance, what consequences the absence of elements in classical worship has (e.g., the lack of sermons from the Old Testament or the lack of intercessory prayer for the persecuted church) and how deeply the elements of the worship service outside of the sermon are able to shape belief through their continual presence or repetition (e.g., the collective prayer for forgiveness, which humbles Christians, and the absence of which is mostly a sign of a certain feeling that Christians are principally better than other people [comp. Luke 18:11-14]).

The thought of the common bond of glorification in the worship service and in dogmatics and ethics is arguably most pronounced in Orthodox theology. The classic statement may be the following: “The lack of agreement between liturgy and ethics leads to an undesired separation between that which is worldly and that which is holy.”³⁷

6. THE GLORY OF GOD

When the glory of God is commended to people, this has two sides in the Bible. On the one hand, it has to do with recognizing the glory God already has eternally, be it one way or the other. This is regardless of how we stand in relation to him, for he is the God of glory (Acts 7:2), “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father” (Ephesians 1:17). Just as on Mount Sinai, God’s glory comes from above and becomes visible for people to see (Exodus 24:16-17).

What is created is called glorious only insofar as it is derived from God’s glory, with humankind leading the way as the image of God (above all in Psalm 8:6: “You . . . crowned him with glory and honor”).³⁸ However, this also includes celestial bodies (1 Corinthians 15:40f.) or the splendid lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28), even if since the fall all of this “glory” is ephemeral just as the grass is. This means that in the end every form of glory only reflects the glory of God.³⁹

On the other hand, we are talking about a glory which we give to God, the glorification of God, which in the end only acknowledges his existing glory, as Psalm 150:2 makes clear: “Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.” The church father and martyr Irenaeus of Lyons formulated it briefly and concisely: “For the glory of God is a living man [gloria Dei vivens homo]; and the life of man consists in beholding God” (*Against Heresies* IV.20:7).

³⁷ GUROIAN, *Incarnate Love*, p. 399. The liturgy of Orthodox worship is described in German best by GOGOL, Nikolaj V. *Betrachtungen über die Göttliche Liturgie*. Würzburg: Der christliche Osten, 1989.

³⁸ On Psalm 8 in the New Testament see BRÜNENBERG, Esther, *Der Mensch in Gottes Herrlichkeit: Psalm 8 und seine Rezeption im Neuen Testament*. Forschungen zur Bibel 119. Würzburg: Echter, 2009, pp. 135-239.

³⁹ Especially according to BARTH, *Dogmatik*, vol. 8, p. 364.

Scholastic theology differentiated between the inner honor of God, which is in essence inherent to his nature, and the external honor of God, which he assigns to humankind and is expressed in reverence shown by individuals. People see the glory of God (Numbers 14:22) and are responsible to see to it that “the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth” (verse 21). We render God honor which is due him anyway and which he has anyway, as becomes clear in 1 Chronicles 16:28-29: “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”

What also belongs to the glory of God is the fact that he shares his honor with no one (Isaiah 48:11; Exodus 20:1), which means for us that nobody else is to be given honor, no other gods and powers, also no other people, be it the state, or the church, or the individual himself. In this connection, there has been talk of the idea that an unholy life led by believers in God brings disgrace to God, at least in the eyes of non-believers: “You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’” (Romans 2:23-24).

God inexplicably ties his honor to his people. Thus, in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 48:10-13, one reads that he calls, tests, and refines “Israel” because he is the almighty Creator (verse 13) and that “for my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another” (verse 11). Correspondingly, in the New Testament, in Ephesians 1:9-2:22, one sees that God saves the church by grace and has it mature in good works so that all powers will recognize his greatness and “in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory” (1:12). Ultimately, the following applies to believers: “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:3-4; comp. 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

7. GOODNESS TO THE HONOR OF GOD – GRATITUDE AS THE HIGHEST COMMANDMENT

Conversely, it is repeatedly emphasized that everything good that we do should occur to the honor of God. Thus, the following is said of the gifts of grace: “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11). According to 1 Corinthians 6:20, we are “bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” Thus, what we do physically is included here, as 1 Corinthians 10:31 demonstrates with respect to eating: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

The highest commandment within Christian ethics that remains is to thank God, to honor God, and to love him with all of one's heart. In Romans 1:16-32, Paul proceeds on the assumption that humankind's original sin is not a certain concrete act. Rather, it lies in man's failure to thank and revere his Creator and instead to worship other things and other beings. The concrete sins, such as slander or sexual aberration are, first of all, the consequence of God giving humankind over to their desires of their hearts (verses 26, 28). Besides, it is typical for Paul that in the middle of his dogmatic-ethical remarks he erupts into spontaneous praise: ". . . the creator . . . who is forever praised. Amen" (verse 25).

It is revealing that at the beginning of the Old Testament, Genesis 4 follows Genesis 3, i.e., the break with God occurred and then fratricide, which is one of its consequences. It would appear more insightful to see the horrible guilt of fratricide as the Fall and the broken relationship with God as the result of it. However, the Bible already emphasizes at this point that the destroyed relationship among people is just a consequence of the destroyed relationship between people and God.

8. AWE BEFORE GOD AND HIS BEING AS THE STARTING POINT FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The Old and New Testament term "fear of God" (better expressed as "awe") very clearly illustrates the basic normative principle of Christian ethics, which sees everything that happens as intended for the glory of God. Ernst Luthardt has written that "as early as the Old Testament, the fear of God, trust in God, and love of God are the roots of moral behavior."⁴⁰

The essence of wisdom literature in the Old Testament is, then, found in the statement⁴¹: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10; similarly 1:7) or even with more brevity: "The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom" (Job 28:28), whereby "wisdom" here is practical life wisdom and not a purely intellectual item, as the supplements to these statements in other texts demonstrate: "The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 15:33); "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts⁴² have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10). Ethical wisdom without the fear of God is thus unthinkable in the Bible. For that reason, the consequence is as follows: "To fear the Lord is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13).

⁴⁰ LUTHARDT, Chr. Ernst. *Kompendium der theologischen Ethik*. Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1921³, p. 9.

⁴¹ Comp. VON RAD, Gerhard. *Weisheit in Israel*. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985³, pp. 90-94.

⁴² In Hebrew grammar, the "his" refers to the "precepts" in Psalm 111:7, but in the old translations referred to the "fear of the Lord." However, no true contradiction lies therein.

Both the Old and the New Testaments have to do with God, who is by far the person mentioned more often in the Bible. At the same time, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Covenants are oriented virtually through and through towards people's lives. This practical orientation does not, however, occur at the expense of occupation with God. Rather, it arises from the fact that the essence of God, whom the Bible reveals, is repeatedly the reason for ethical instructions and decisions. David correctly sings: "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing" (Psalm 16:2).

For that reason, W. S. Bruce has written the following about the Old Testament: "In Israel it is God himself who is the all wise one, the holy one, and the good one, the prototype of all moral life and action."⁴³

Religious faith and ethical life are so intimately bound together through this foundational conception of the character of God that they cannot be separated from each other. "At this point, Jewish ethics hooks into theology, but theology is itself essentially of an ethical nature."⁴⁴

Emil Brunner coined a similar formula: "There is no 'goodness in itself,'"⁴⁵ since there is no goodness without one who is good, who creates it, mandates it, and enables it.

What is good is what God does and wishes; what is evil is what occurs against the will of God. Goodness has its foundation and existence solely in God's will. An idea such as Zarathustra's religion, that God is the Lord because he chose the good, the idea of a law which stands above God, is unthinkable in the Old Testament. God is not merely a guardian of the moral law and of moral rules. Rather, he is their Creator.⁴⁶

The will of God

... is the sole valid norm. For that reason, what is "religious" is at the same time what is "moral", and the moral is religious. The relation to God is grounded in God's covenant with humankind; for that reason, it is a relationship of trust. It is nothing like a blind force of nature which asserts claim to God's rights of Lordship.⁴⁷

⁴³ BRUCE, W. S. *The Ethics of the Old Testament*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 39 using the quote by W. L. Davidson.

⁴⁵ BRUNNER, Emil. *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*. Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1939⁴, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 39. Brunner points out in *ibid.*, pp. 83+578-579, that the Aristotelian-Thomistic (arising due to St. Thomas Aquinas' seizing upon the Greek philosopher Aristotle) ethics of the Christian Middle Ages contradicted this principle and placed a principle of the good as an objective entity in the place of the will of God and action appropriate to human nature ("natural law") as a subjective reaction in place of obedience.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

Since God himself is justice and he himself institutes just order, he cannot be unjust: “Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong” (Job 34:10; similarly Job 8:3; Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Chronicles 19:7).

God is the point of departure and the authority of Christian ethics. Wherever another set of ethics applies, there is the application of another authority besides the authority of God, for “the [final] authority of a system is the God of that system.”⁴⁸

All of this applies not only to foundational statements, such as: “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2; similarly 11:44). It also applies to individual questions. This is how Paul justifies his very specific directions as to how many prophets are allowed to speak after each other in a worship service (1 Corinthians 14:26-32), for instance with the statement: “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). To mention an additional example, in the Ten Commandments the seventh day of the week is a day of rest for God because God himself rested in the creation of the world on the seventh day and blessed that day (Exodus 20:11).

There are additional examples for substantiating commands within the Ten Commandments using the essence of God. One would include grounding the prohibition against revering other Gods on the jealousy of God (“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God”, Exodus 20:5). Furthermore, the prohibition against the misuse of God’s name is justified with reference to God as an afflicting God (Exodus 20:7) and the overall rationale behind the Ten Commandments is the goodness of God (“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out . . . of the land of slavery”, Exodus 20:2).

9. THE TWOFOLD COMMANDMENT: LOVE AND HONOR GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

The combination of honoring God and keeping his commandments, or loving God and, for that reason, loving his commands and living them out is something that pervades the entirety of the Holy Scriptures. It is the foundational structure of the Ten Commandments. The Book of Ecclesiastes ends with “the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In Micah 6:8 one reads: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” It is similarly stated in Deuteronomy 13:4: “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.”

⁴⁸ DeMAR, Gary. *God and Government*. Vol. 1. Atlanta, GA: American Vision Press, 1984 (1982 reprint), p. 58.

In the middle of the praise in Psalm 86:8-13 regarding the hope that all peoples will worship God and all the praise to the goodness of God because he rescues people from death, one reads in verse 11: “Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” “The great commandment” is well known and is as follows: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The other is this: “. . . love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:19-31). At this point worship and ethics are placed on the same level.

The inalienability of the teaching of the Trinity and of the reverence given to the Triune God lies, in my opinion, among Father, Son, and Spirit. He did not first have to create a counterpart in order to be able to actually love. Rather, love is the agenda of the creation, and it is founded on the fact that the world was created by a God who is eternally love and not so only theoretically. Rather, it is in practical terms out of an eternal relationship of love.

10. SHAME AND GUILT

At this point, one has to go in detail into a question that has been carried over from missiology to systematic theology, namely the question of how the difference between guilt-oriented and shame-oriented cultures influences our topic and whether Biblical revelation is closer to one or the other culture. Since issues in shame-oriented cultures are addressed primarily as matters of “honor,” Christians who live in those contexts particularly emphasize God’s honor. Since on a global basis evangelicals are in the meantime at home in shame-oriented cultures, evangelical missionaries, missiologists, and anthropologists have submitted related groundbreaking studies.⁴⁹

In my book *Culture of Shame/Culture of Guilt* (German original *Scham- oder Schuldgefühl?*), I have spoken out at length in favor of the complementarity of the Biblical message with respect to this question. It is for this reason that shame-oriented cultures have accumulated needs in the area of Biblical understandings of law and guilt – all the way into how it applies to politics. Conversely, guilt-oriented cultures, for instance our German culture, have accumulated needs on how the Bible sees the loss of one’s own honor and the disavowal of God’s glory as consequences of the Fall, and, contrariwise, have the need to come to a deeper understanding of how the cross of Jesus restores God’s honor and, with that, has restored and will restore our honor.

⁴⁹ For example, WIHER, Hannes. *Shame and Guilt: A Key to Cross-Cultural Ministry*. Edition IWG – Mission Academics 10. Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2003, and LOMEN, Martin. *Sünde und Scham im biblischen und islamischen Kontext*. Edition Afem – Mission Scripts 21. Nürnberg: VTR, 2003, as well as a collective volume by SCHIRRMACHER, Thomas, and MÜLLER, Klaus W. (eds.), *Scham- und Schuldorientierung in der Diskussion: Kulturanthropologische, missiologische und theologische Einsichten*. Bonn: VKW & Nürnberg: VTR, 2006.

As a violation of the law of God, sin against God leads to guilt before God. And as an encroachment on the honor/glory of God, sin leads to shame before God. Only through God's righteousness and God's honor/glory is it possible for man's righteousness to be restored.⁵⁰

This ultimate position of the honor of God makes it impossible to exclude aspects of an orientation towards honor and dishonor from Christian dogmatics and ethics!

The Bible is full of summons to give God the honor which is due him (e.g., 1 Chronicles 16:28; Psalm 3:4; 19:2; Luke 12:14). In the process, to "give honor" is in the final sense adoration, i.e., worship, and in the final analysis it is something that only God is entitled to: "Oh, praise the greatness of our God!" (Deuteronomy 32:3).

Admittedly, what becomes very clear here is that the Biblical question is not whether we are shame or guilt-oriented. Rather, it orients itself towards our honor and justness. Whoever orients his sense of honor towards people as the final norm errs just as much as he who orients his sense of justness towards people as the final norm.

To some extent, one also interestingly finds at this point Biblical complementarity between shame and guilt orientations in the main confessions of the Reformation. While the Lutheran discovery was above all that justification is not allowed to be oriented towards people and cannot in the final event be produced by people, but is rather a gift of God, the Reformed called for everything to be oriented towards the glory and honor of God and to make this the highest goal of life – without giving up the Lutheran discovery. An individual can produce this honor out of himself as little as he can do so with justness. Through God's justness, an individual can become just and come to God, and through God's honor and glory, an individual can gain the derived glory of the children of God. Together, both lead to a situation where we can have fellowship and peace with God (Romans 5:1).

God's honor means, on the one hand, being oriented towards giving up one's own honor and not orienting oneself towards obtaining honor from people. One should primarily have shame before God and not before people. For that reason, people are criticized who do wrong things out of fear of other people. A Christian should orient himself towards God and not towards shame before other people: "However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:16). "What will others think of me?" is not a proper life principle.

⁵⁰ SCHIRRMACHER, Thomas. *Scham- oder Schuldgefühl? Die christliche Botschaft angesichts von schuld- und schamorientierten Gewissen und Kulturen*. Bonn: VKW, 2005. Likewise idea-Dokumentation 8/2005, p. 39.

The absence of self-redemption means: Justness and honor are unable to be produced by individuals on their own. According to cultural orientation, self-redemption can come to express that all men think they are able to work up the necessary justification before God on their own as well as to think that one is able to work up honor and glory before God on their own. God has created us to be imbued with honor and justification and has also given us as individuals a conscience with a shame and guilt orientation. Both orientations significantly contribute to succeeding in life both within the individual and within the community.

Sin against God, as a violation of the law of God, leads to guilt before God. And as an encroachment on the honor/glory of God, sin leads to shame before God. For that reason, according to Genesis 3, Adam and Eve considered themselves guilty before God as well as being ashamed (Genesis 3:9-12). Only through God's righteousness and God's honor/glory is it possible for man's righteousness to be restored.

Suggestions for further study:

1. In the middle of a theological discussion, Paul breaks out into spontaneous, practical praise (Romans 1:25). Why would that seem to be strange in a project paper or dissertation nowadays?
2. How can one recognize for him or herself when good works and sanctification are not serving the glory of God but rather oneself?
3. Discuss the statement in the 1647 Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

RESUMO

O autor argumenta que a ética cristã está intimamente ligada não apenas à doutrina, mas também ao culto. Estando enraizada na justiça de Deus, ela é tanto um componente quanto uma consequência direta do culto. Esse fato aponta para o verdadeiro sentido de "ortodoxia", a saber, correta ou verdadeira adoração. Historicamente, essa conexão tem sido especialmente acentuada nas tradições ortodoxa grega e reformada. No protestantismo, a doxologia como origem e alvo da ética é uma característica do movimento reformado desde que João Calvino colocou a glória de Deus no centro de sua teologia, sendo seguido por catecismos reformados como os de Heidelberg e Westminster. Portanto, existe uma afinidade inescapável entre liturgia e ética, conforme expresso na antiga máxima "lex orandi, lex credendi". Na segunda parte do artigo, o autor articula uma teologia bíblica da ética doxológica, abordando temas como a glória de Deus, a gratidão como o mandamento supremo, a reverência diante de Deus como o ponto de partida da ética cristã e o duplo dever de amar a Deus e ao próximo. Finalmente, é feita uma comparação, sugerida pela missiologia, entre culturas orientadas para a vergonha e orientadas para

a culpa, aquelas estando preocupadas com a honra e estas com a justiça. Tais orientações derivam do pecado tanto como violação da lei de Deus (culpa) quando como transgressão da honra/glória de Deus (vergonha).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ética cristã; Doxologia; Culto; Tradição ortodoxa; Tradição reformada; Glória de Deus; Dez Mandamentos; Vergonha e culpa.